

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 HA-05 HEW-04 HUD-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00

PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01

SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11 DOE-15 SOE-02 TRSE-00 EB-08

COME-00 FRB-03 AID-05 CEQ-01 EPA-01 DOTE-00 /111 W

-----083724 120337Z /70

R 110740Z JUL 78

FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0669

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY MANILA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SINGAPORE 3073

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: PINT, SOCI, SN

SUBJECT: DOMESTIC CONCERNS OF SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT

1. FOLLOWING IS A SUMMARY OF AN AIRGRAM BEING SENT TO THE DEPARTMENT ON THE PRESENT DOMESTIC POLITICAL CONCERNS OF THE SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT AND ITS PLANS FOR THE NEXT DECADE.

2. AN USUALLY DETAILED PICTURE OF THE PRESENT DOMESTIC CONCERNS OF THE SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT IS EMERGING FROM A SERIES OF RECENT SPEECHES BY GOVERNMENT LEADERS AND HIGH-LEVEL INTRAMURAL DISCUSSIONS AMONG THE LEADERSHIP. HAVING COPED WITH THE PROBLEMS OF THE SIXTIES, PRINCIPALLY THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE FOUNDATIONS OF AN INDEPENDENT STATE FOLLOWING EXPULSION FROM MALAYSIA, AND HAVING SUCCESSFULLY MET THE TEMPORARY SET-BACK OF THE WORLD ECONOMIC RECESSION OF THE MID-SEVENTIES, LEE KUAN YEW'S ADMINISTRATION IS NOW BEGINNING TO ASSESS ITS POSITION AND CHART ITS COURSE FOR THE EIGHTIES.

3. THE FIRST AREA OF CONCERN COMES UNDER THE GENERAL RUBRIC
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OF "QUALITY OF LIFE," A SUBJECT THE PRIME MINISTER HAS PERSONALLY DIRECTED HIS CABINET TO STUDY. THIS INCLUDES MAKING THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT MORE ATTRACTIVE--CONTINUING THE GREENING OF SINGAPORE, REPLACING THE FEW REMAINING SLUMS, CONTROLLING TRAFFIC POLLUTION, ETC.--AND ALSO FOSTERING CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT.

4. THE LEADERSHIP IS EQUALLY CONCERNED WITH DEVELOPING A COMMUNITY SPIRIT AMONG SINGAPORE RESIDENTS. SINGAPORE HISTORICALLY HAS BEEN A SOCIETY OF IMMIGRANTS WHO CAME TO MAKE THEIR FORTUNE WITH THE INTENTION IN MANY CASES OF EVENTUALLY RETURNING WHENCE THEY CAME. IN ADDITION, THE REMARKABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH OF THE PAST TEN TO TWELVE YEARS HAS CONTRIBUTED TO WHAT MANY SINGAPOREANS ARE BEGINNING TO SEE AS A ROOTLESS, BRASHLY COMMERCIAL URBAN ENVIRONMENT WITH THE ATTENDANT PROBLEMS OF SOCIAL ISOLATION, SUICIDE, DRUG ADDICTION, AND CRIME. ALTHOUGH THE GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN QUITE SUCCESSFUL IN CURBING THE OUTWARD MANIFESTATIONS OF THESE URBAN ILLS, THE LEADERSHIP SEES AN INCREASING NEED TO DEVELOP POSITIVE PROGRAMS TO INSTILL COMMUNITY SPIRIT AND NATIONAL IDENTITY AND LOYALTY.

5. GOVERNMENT LEADERS ALSO SEE THE QUESTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AS BEING PART OF THE CONCERN WITH THE QUALITY OF LIFE. SINGAPORE ALREADY HAS BEEN MARKEDLY SUCCESSFUL IN MEETING THE BASIC HUMAN NEEDS OF ITS PEOPLE. IN RECENT MONTHS THE LEE ADMINISTRATION HAS DEMONSTRATED A DESIRE TO LIBERALIZE POLITICAL DISCUSSION AND THE LIMITS OF PRESS FREEDOM, WITHOUT, HOWEVER, LETTING DOWN ITS GUARD AGAINST WHAT IT SEES AS THE CONTINUED THREAT OF EXTERNALLY SUPPORTED COMMUNIST SUBVERSION.

6. A SECOND AREA TO WHICH THE GOVERNMENT LEADERSHIP IS DEVOTING PRIMARY ATTENTION IS THAT OF LINKS BETWEEN THE

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GOVERNMENT AND THE PEOPLE. IN AN ORGANIZATIONAL SENSE THIS IS BEING DONE THROUGH THE REVITALIZATION OF THE PEOPLE'S ASSOCIATION AND THE COMMUNITY CENTERS, AND THROUGH THE ESTABLISHMENT OF RESIDENTS' COMMITTEES AT HOUSING ESTATES (SEE SINGAPORE A-36). THE CLOSE AND COMPLEX RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT, THE PEOPLE'S ACTION PARTY, AND THE NATIONAL TRADES UNION CONGRESS IS ALSO RECEIVING ATTENTION.

7. AN ESSENTIAL ELEMENT IN BOTH OF THESE ENDEAVORS--ENCOURAGING COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND THE PEOPLE AND DEVELOPING A SENSE OF COMMUNITY AND NATIONAL LOYALTY--IS THE MATTER OF LANGUAGE. THE LANGUAGE ISSUE HAS BECOME THE MOST WIDELY DEBATED TOPIC OF THE YEAR IN SINGAPORE, WITH THE PRIME MINISTER HIMSELF PARTICIPATING IN HOURS OF TELEVISED PRIME-TIME DISCUSSION. TWO ASPECTS ARE ENCOMPASSED: THE CONSOLIDATION OF ENGLISH AS THE WORKING AND LINKING LANGUAGE OF SINGAPORE, AND THE RETENTION OF THE "MOTHER TONGUE" AS THE LANGUAGE OF CULTURE AND VALUES. A PARTICULAR FOCUS OF THE PRESENT DISCUSSION IS THE ROLE OF MANDARIN IN SINGAPORE, WITH GOVERNMENT POLICY BEING TO ESTABLISH MANDARIN AS THE COMMON LANGUAGE OF THE 75 PERCENT OF THE SINGAPORE POPULATION WHO ARE ETHNIC CHINESE DESPITE THE FACT THAT IT IS ACTUALLY THE MOTHER TONGUE FOR VERY

FEW OF THEM.

8. A THIRD FOCUS OF ATTENTION FOR THE SINGAPORE LEADERSHIP IS THE QUESTION OF POLITICAL SUCCESSION. THE PRESENT LEADERSHIP, FORGED IN THE BATTLE AGAINST ITS ERSTWHILE ANTI-COLONIAL COMMUNIST COLLEAGUES AND THE STRUGGLE TO ESTABLISH A VIABLE STATE, SHARES A SENSE OF PURPOSE AND HARDNESS OF WILL WHICH IT FEARS MAY BE LACKING IN THOSE WHO HAVE MATURED IN THE EASIER ENVIRONMENT IT HAS CREATED. THE PERCEIVED SUSCEPTIBILITY OF THE YOUNGER GENERATION, WHOSE MOST PROMISING MEMBERS ARE ENGLISH-EDUCATED, TO THE LIBERTARIAN AND DECADENT ASPECTS OF WESTERN CULTURE IS ALSO A MATTER OF CONCERN. THERE HAS BEEN CONSIDERABLE EMPHASIS IN RECENT SEMINARS AND YOUTH LEADERSHIP COURSES ON THE "ASIAN VALUES" OF HARD WORK, THRIFT, AND
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EFFICIENCY. INCULCATING SUCH VALUES, HOWEVER, MAY PROVE LESS DIFFICULT THAN FOSTERING CREATIVE AND TOUGH-MINDED SECOND GENERATION POLITICAL LEADERSHIP.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: REPORTS, POLITICAL SITUATION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 11 jul 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978SINGAP03073
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: X1
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780284-0897
Format: TEL
From: SINGAPORE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780774/aaaackan.tel
Line Count: 140
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 26edce77-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 05 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2050326
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: DOMESTIC CONCERNS OF SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT
TAGS: PINT, SOCI, SN
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/26edce77-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014